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The Moon Garden

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Abstract

The major work of the Ph.D. (Creative Writing) is a novel about the pressures contemporary women still face, despite the legacy of feminism, as they negotiate a complex, materialistic society that emphasises personal appearance (beauty) and acclaim.

In *The Moon Garden*, the main character, Elizabeth (Lizzy) Mathews grows up in suburbia, ignorant of changing social mores and the feminist movement. Her mother, entrenched in 1950s ideologies, dominates Lizzy's life, steering Lizzy toward the promised 'happy ever after' as a married woman with children. Lizzy spends her early life trying to live up to expectations, seeking approval and validation from those she loves. Music becomes an escape from the contradictions she's confronted with as she develops into a beautiful young woman. Her life takes a dramatic turn when she becomes a fashion model and wins a beauty competition. Instead of escaping the pressure to conform to ideals of beauty and the performance of femininity, Lizzy finds herself under the microscope as a celebrity. To her surprise, the expected 'happy ever after' never eventuates, not even as a married woman. Grappling with the truth of her life and her own darkness, she struggles to find her path to liberation, digs into the earth and recovers the music within her.

The exegesis, *The Genteel Performance*, explores the process of writing and research involved in *The Moon Garden*. The main focus of research is the relationship between music and fiction, with an emphasis on women's engagement with music as 'genteel performance'. Nineteenth century expectations of musical education for women are linked, in turn, to 'the beauty myth', a topic that has excited contemporary feminists, notably Naomi Wolf.